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ABSTRACT

Truancy is a major problem in the United States that can have negative effects on the future of young people. Truancy may lead to dropping out of school; may be a precursor to delinquent and criminal activity; and places students at higher risk of being drawn into behaviors involving drugs, alcohol, or violence. Furthermore, truancy has high costs to society. This brief describes seven promising programs that have developed a coordinated response to reduce truancy and juvenile delinquency. All of the initiatives emphasize the need to intensively monitor, counsel, and strengthen the families and communities of truant and delinquent youth. They also recognize that parents must be involved and held responsible for the children's school attendance. The following seven programs are described: (1) Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education (THRIVE) in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; (2) the At School, On Time, Ready to Work program in Nemaha County, Kansas; (3) Project Helping Hand in Atlantic County, New Jersey; (4) the Ramsey County Truancy and Curfew Violation Center program in St. Paul, Minnesota; (5) the Truancy Reduction Program in Kern City, California; (6) the Save Kids Partnership in Peoria, Arizona; and (7) a curfew program in Chaves County, New Mexico. A list of resources and contact information are included. (Contains 10 endnotes.) (LMS)

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Office of Justice Programs
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ED 408 666

Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems

Eileen M. Garry

This Bulletin is one of a series of OJJDP Bulletins focusing on strategies in the Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM) initiative. YOEM is a joint effort of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education, to address the needs of youth who attend school irregularly because they are afraid or intimidated, truant, suspended or expelled, school dropouts, or in need of help transitioning back into mainstream schools from juvenile detention and correctional settings.

For most students, skipping school used to be a one-time lark. More often than not, the antics were short-lived because shopkeepers, neighbors, and family friends were quick to report them to parents or school authorities.

Today, truancy has become a major problem in this country that negatively influences the future of our youth and costs taxpayers thousands of dollars. With daily absentee rates as high as 30 percent in some cities, it is not surprising that truancy is rated among the major problems facing schools. The statistics speak volumes:

- In New York City's public school system, the Nation's largest, about 150,000 of 1 million public school students are absent on a typical day. School officials do not know how many of them are absent without a legitimate excuse.[1]

  The Los Angeles Unified School District, the Nation's second largest public school system, reports that an average of 62,000 students, or 10 percent of its enrollment, are out of school each day. Of these, only half come back with written excuses.[2]

- In Detroit, 40 public school attendance officers investigated 66,440 chronic absenteeism complaints during the 1994–95 school year.[3]

Truancy may be the beginning of a lifetime of problems for students who routinely skip school. Because these students fall behind in their school work, many drop out of school. Dropping out is easier than catching up.

Truancy is a stepping stone to delinquent and criminal activity. A report compiled by the Los Angeles County Office of Education on factors contributing to juvenile delinquency concluded that chronic absenteeism is the most powerful predictor of delinquent behavior.[4]

Truant students are at higher risk of being drawn into behavior involving drugs, alcohol, or violence. A California deputy assistant attorney who handles truancy cases says he has "never seen a gang member who wasn't a truant first."[5] Several studies have documented the correlation between drug use and truancy. A report from the University of Maryland found that 51 percent of female juvenile detainees not in school at the time of their arrests tested positive for drug use.[6] Another study by the U.S. Department of Justice's Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) program reported that more than half (53 percent) of a group of 603 male juvenile arrestees in San Diego,

From the Administrator

Although truancy's financial burdens are considerable, its cost cannot be measured in dollars alone. For a growing number of youth, truancy may be a first step to a lifetime of unemployment, crime, and incarceration. As this Bulletin illustrates, truancy often leads to dropping out of school, delinquency, and drug abuse. It may even be the precursor to adult crime.

Classroom absentee rates in our cities are as high as 30 percent. Challenged by this problem's mounting social and economic burden, communities are fighting back. *Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems* describes seven promising community programs that are reducing truancy and juvenile delinquency by enlisting and coordinating a broad array of local resources.

All of the initiatives emphasize the need to intensively monitor, counsel, and strengthen the families and communities of truant and delinquent youth. They also recognize that parents must be involved and held responsible for their children's school attendance. By aggressively intervening when students are young and targeting problems before they start, these programs are making a significant difference in the lives of children and the neighborhoods in which they live.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

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California, tested positive for drug use when taken to juvenile hall. Not surprisingly, those who did not attend school were more likely (67 percent versus 49 percent) to test positive for drug use than those who did attend.[7]

Many police departments report that daytime crime rates are rising in part because students are committing crimes instead of going to class. They are vandalizing cars, shoplifting, and scrawling graffiti on office buildings. When police in Van Nuys, California, conducted a 3-week truancy sweep, shoplifting arrests fell 60 percent.[8] Police in St. Paul, Minnesota, report that crimes such as purse snatching dropped almost 50 percent after police began picking up truants and taking them to a new school attendance center. Officials in Roswell, New Mexico, say daytime burglaries and other reportable crimes in neighborhoods surrounding the town's two high schools have decreased significantly since a daytime curfew ordinance was enacted in 1994.

Society Pays the Price

Truancy is costly. It costs students an education, resulting in reduced earning capacity. It costs school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in lost Federal and State funds that are based on daily attendance figures. It costs businesses, which must pay to train uneducated workers. It costs taxpayers, who must pay higher taxes for law enforcement and welfare costs for dropouts who end up on welfare rolls or underemployed.

Frustrated by this social and economic burden, communities across the Nation are fighting back. Some counties are contemplating fining students if they are not in class during school hours. Others are fining or jailing parents who permit their children to continually miss school. (Note: In this Bulletin, the term "parent" refers to either a parent or other legal guardian.)

Parental neglect is a common cause of truancy. Many parents of truant students do not value education. Some children are kept at home to work or babysit preschool siblings. Others are prevented from attending school because of problems at home, at school, or in their neighborhood. One truant officer described a student whose parents kept him home so that he would not have to walk past the neighborhood crack house, and immigrant students in Minnesota reported staying home because they fear students at their schools.

Because truancy often indicates bigger problems in a child's life, many communities are designing truancy reduction programs that involve schools, law enforcement, families, businesses, judicial and social service agencies, and community and youth service organizations. Seven programs, located in Arizona, California, Kansas, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, are achieving good results through innovative approaches that:

- Recognize that parents must be involved and held responsible for their children's school attendance.
- Provide intensive monitoring, counseling, and other family-strengthening services to truants and their families.

Each program described below has addressed the truancy issue by developing a coordinated response that takes advantage of programs in their community. One uses probation officers to intervene with students, while another depends on the county attorney. Several have targeted their efforts at middle school students, while others are working with children as young as 5 years old.

Truancy Program Thriving

Public and private agencies in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, have pooled resources and expertise for a program that has successfully removed truant juveniles from the streets during school hours and reduced absenteeism, dropout rates, and daytime crime rates.

Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education (THRIVE)—a consortium of law enforcement, social service, and community agencies—was initiated by the Oklahoma County District Attorney's Office. THRIVE fills a gap in services to youth by dealing with community problems that need a coordinated strategy.

The program began its efforts by convincing the Oklahoma State legislature to enact a tougher antitruancy law that allows misdemeanor charges to be filed against parents if their children miss more than 10 consecutive days of school. The law also authorizes local law enforcement professionals to act as attendance officers, detain truant juveniles, and transport them to a specified location after agreement with a school district.

The consortium's next challenge was to open a truant processing center, which began operating in 1989. Consortium members provide staff, facilities, supplies, and equipment, and they have since opened a second center. Open full-time during the school year, the centers are staffed by professional volunteers from the district attorney's office, police department, and public schools. A private, nonprofit organization, Youth Cornerstone, was established in 1990 to provide greater opportunities for funding.

Police officers transport truant students to the centers, where they are interviewed and their parents are contacted. School officials also are contacted to confirm students' school status and to determine if a pattern of absences exists. This information is provided to parents when they arrive at the center. Referrals for additional services are provided as needed. Students are released directly to a parent or relative within 1 hour or turned over to the Youth Services Shelter. The district attorney's office sends parents a letter informing them of compulsory school attendance laws and the consequences of nonattendance. Followup attendance checks are made after students have had contact with THRIVE.

With an annual budget of $75,000, the program served 848 children (with an average age of 13.8) during the 1994–95 school year. The program was patterned after the Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression (TABS) Program in San Jose, California, a community similar demographically to Oklahoma City. The THRIVE model has been used to implement similar programs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and in other cities.

THRIVE is making a difference in the lives of children. Since 1989, the program has dealt with more than 3,600 truants. During this time, the Oklahoma City Police Department reports a 33-percent reduction in daytime burglaries. Oklahoma City schools report a 1.3-percent reduction in dropout rates and a 1.7-percent increase in daily attendance. More than 75 percent of truants are released to parents, who generally react positively to the opportunity to address the issue of school attendance with their children.

For more information about THRIVE, contact:

Pam Harrell
Executive Director
P.O. Box 18674
Oklahoma City, OK 73154
405-841-4675

Truancy Program Targets Problems Before They Start

Children who continually miss school often are placed in the custody of social service agencies, a move that is traumatic for children and their families and expensive for taxpayers. Recognizing the need to address this problem and find a way to keep these children in school, officials in Neosho County, Kansas, developed a program that helps prevent a child's removal from home, increases school attendance, and strengthens families.

The program began in 1993 when Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) officers in the city of Chanute noticed a correlation between truancy and crime. With the Neosho County Attorney and local teachers, they initiated the At School, On Time, Ready to Work program. It recognizes that truancy is a problem not only for children, but also for families, schools, and communities. Schools, SRS, and courts work together to provide intensive supervision and therapy for children and support and education for parents.

Under Kansas law, all children under the age of 16 not attending school are reported to SRS or to the county attorney. Pending a referral from the school, the county attorney invites the truant child and his or her family to enter the program. If they agree, parent and child are required to sign a contract to participate in the program for 90 days. During this time, the program provides:

- **Intensive supervision of the child.** An intensive supervision worker is assigned for the entire 90-day period, verifying the child's school attendance daily and meeting several times a week with him or her during the first 30 days of the contract. The worker serves as the liaison between SRS, the county attorney, the school, and the family.
- **Support and group therapy services to the child.** Students in the program meet regularly to share life experiences with a licensed family therapist and to learn skills to build self-esteem and confidence in school. Children in need of individual therapy are referred to the appropriate agency.
- **Support and education services to the parents of the child.** Parents are required to attend group meetings that focus on effective parenting techniques and the importance of their child's education.

After a family completes the program, students are tracked, with particular attention given to ensuring their attendance at school.

Of the 9 families and 12 middle school children enrolled in the project during the 1994–95 school year, only 1 child became the subject of a court petition. The remaining children stayed out of SRS custody, and none were reported to have committed offenses during the summer. The families who "graduated" from the program reported that they improved family communication and better understood and worked with their children's behavior.

The program was so well received that it moved to elementary schools last year (1995–96), where it served an additional 12 to 15 families and approximately 20 children. Graduates of the program will be tracked to determine if intervention at an earlier stage prevents truancy and juvenile offending.

Neosho County Attorney Sheryl A. Beagley, pleased with results from the first 2 years of the program, reports that the county has received inquiries from other communities interested in implementing it. She believes it can be replicated because it is so cost-effective. The cost of the project for the nine families served in 1994–95 was $3,000—the cost of placing one child in SRS custody for 90 days. The program received private insurance, Medicaid, and State Family Services funds. The program used $1,600 in Family Services funds, which is much less than the cost of keeping a child in foster care for 30 days. Before the truancy project was established, SRS routinely placed children in foster care because of truancy. Taxpayers may have saved as much as $30,000 in custody expenses by spending only 10 percent of that amount on prevention.

For more information about At School, On Time, Ready to Work, contact:

Sheryl A. Beagley
Neosho County Attorney's Office
Judicial Center
P.O. Box 370
102 South Lincoln
Chanute, KS 66720
316–431–5750

Program Offers a Helping Hand

Officials in Atlantic County, New Jersey, are preventing truancy through a program that encourages parents to work with schools to keep their children in class. Project Helping Hand is an early identification and intervention program that provides counseling for parents and elementary students at risk of developing chronic truancy problems. It began in 1989 with Title II Formula Grants Program funds from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in the U.S. Department of Justice. (The Title II Formula Grants Program provides grants to States to prevent and control delinquency and to improve their juvenile justice systems.)

Students are referred to the program by school officials, although referrals from parents or social service agencies are also accepted. Students who have 5 to 15 days of unexcused absence, excluding absence due to illness or suspension, are eligible to participate.

Once a student has been accepted into the program, a counselor immediately begins gathering student information from school personnel and makes every effort, including a home visit if necessary, to contact parents.

After an in-person assessment of the youth and family, the counselor meets jointly with the family and school personnel to develop a plan to improve the child's attendance and address family needs. The program offers weekly counseling for up to 8 weeks.

Counselors use a variety of intervention strategies and resources, including signed cooperative agreements among parents, youth, and the school; telephone discussions with appropriate parties; and other school resources such as child study teams, tutoring, and parent-teacher conferences. When necessary, counselors also refer families to housing, food stamp, day care, medical, substance abuse, psychiatric, parent support, and single-parent programs.

Counselors strive to use extended family members as a support system and to involve the family with the school as often as possible so that they understand school procedures and are comfortable working with the school on their child's behalf.

If a family fails to keep appointments, counselors often make home visits to encourage cooperation. If parents continue to resist participating or school attendance does not improve, the case may be referred to the Family Court.

Once a student's school attendance improves and other needed services have begun, the counselor closes the case and places the student on aftercare status. School personnel are then responsible for monitoring attendance and communicating with parents. The counselor makes phone or in-person contact with the family, school, and others at 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals, reinforcing the positive work of the family and ensuring their continued participation in referral services.

The program operates in 12 schools. Referrals are distributed equally between males and females. In keeping with the program's focus on early prevention, most students referred to the program are in grades K–3.

The program was originally implemented in Atlantic City, the county's main urban area. It has been expanded to the suburb of Pleasantville and to Egg Harbor Township.

According to Sally Ann Williams, director of family counseling, 83 percent of the 290 children participating in the program in the 1994–95 school year experienced no recidivism. For the 1995–96 school year, 84 percent experienced no recidivism. These numbers are consistent with results from previous years.

For more information about Project Helping Hand, contact:

Sally Ann Williams
or Colleen Denelsbeck
Atlantic County Division of
Intergenerational Services
101 South Shore Road
Northfield, NJ 08225
609–645–5862

Police and Youth Services Work Together To Fight Truancy

Recognizing that truant students were a growing concern in St. Paul, Minnesota, four Ramsey County departments devised the Ramsey County Truancy and Curfew Violation Center program, which uses school counselors, the county attorney's office, and police to help keep middle school students in school. The program began in 1994 and provides the following intensive truancy reduction efforts:

- **Intervention through the school.** Students with 3 to 5 days of unexcused absence are referred to the St. Paul Youth Service Bureau (YSB) for assistance with problem solving, counseling, family intervention, and other social services. A YSB staff person spends 4 days a week at the school, meeting with the student and parents to determine why the student is missing school and what services are needed to resolve the problem. The staff member monitors the student's attendance daily and, if necessary, refers the case to the county attorney's office for further legal action.
- **Intervention through the county attorney's office.** First-time truants and their parents are given an educational presentation by a Ramsey County attorney. If a student continues to be truant, the county attorney schedules a meeting with the student, parents, and school staff to develop a contract for improved attendance. If the contract is not followed, an expedited court hearing is scheduled.
- **Intervention through St. Paul Schools Attendance Center.** Police officers pick up truants and deliver them to the Attendance Center, which is staffed by educational assistants and staff from YSB. Students are released only to parents or guardians.

The program's counseling services are funded with OJJDP Title V funds for local delinquency prevention and by the city of St. Paul, YSB, the St. Paul Police Department, and local schools. YSB counselors offer student and family counseling; peer and parent support groups; tutoring, recreational, and enrichment activities; and referrals to community resources to help families address issues contributing to truant behavior.

St. Paul's Attendance Center is an important part of the program because it gives police a place to take truants and offers students access to intervention services. It accepts 10 to 15 students a day. Last year the Center served more than 1,100 truants and their families, the majority of whom were from the Hmong (North Laos) community. These students reported boredom or fear as the major reasons they did not attend school. In these cases, project counselors work with schools to alleviate the problem and reach out to parents through local parent-teacher organizations. The program plans to develop a mechanism to track the 250 students who were directly served by YSB counselors at the middle schools during 1994–95.

The program has had a positive impact on the court system. Because truants are taken to the Attendance Center instead of being handled through the courts, the backlog of court processing has been reduced drastically. Local law enforcement officials like the program because it gives officers a place to take truants without requiring cumbersome paperwork at the police department. Police also report that truancy enforcement is having a noticeable impact on the crime rate. According to Police Chief William Finney, between 1994 and 1995, the Attendance Center's first year of existence, crimes such as purse snatching were reduced nearly 50 percent.

For more information about the Ramsey County Truancy and Curfew Violation Center, contact:

Sgt. John Harrington
St. Paul Police Department
100 East 11th Street
St. Paul, MN 55101
612–292–3612

Helping Neglected Children Stay in School

Probation officers and school officials have joined together in Kern County, California, to help children, many of them neglected, stay in school. The Truancy Reduction Program works to increase average daily school attendance by reducing the risk factors contributing to children's behavioral, delinquency, and substance abuse problems.

Funded by the Kern County Superintendent of Schools through a consortium of independent school districts, the program uses two deputy probation officers from the Kern County Probation Office to work with students and their families.

Students are referred to the program by consortium member schools after intervention efforts have failed to improve their school attendance. Once a student is referred, a probation officer contacts his or her parents by mail and then meets with the family at least four times.

The officer also makes unannounced home visits, checks attendance at the school each week, counsels parents and students, and refers the families to social

service agencies. The attendance of every student referred to the program is tracked by the school for 1 year. When students continue to skip school, the probation officer refers them back to the school for possible referral to the district attorney's office.

These interventions are designed to improve attendance, increase academic performance, and improve social functioning by meeting the diverse needs of children and their families.

The majority of students referred to the program receive assistance from one or more of the county's social service agencies, and the probation officer frequently networks with caseworkers from these agencies. This networking, as well as followup monitoring, contributes to the program's success.

During the 1993–94 school year, 626 students participated in the program; 347 participated in 1994–95. These students represent less than 1.5 percent and 1 percent, respectively, of the student population in their school districts. Twenty-one percent of the students in the program in 1993–94 had no unexcused absences after entering the program, compared with 14 percent in 1994–95.

The number of students participating decreased from 1993 to 1994 because of significant changes in the program's referral process between 1993 and 1995. Starting in the fall of 1994, student referrals were reviewed by a school student assistance team before their acceptance, resulting in more appropriate identification of truant students and decreased caseloads. Data for the 1995–96 school year will be available in late 1996.

For more information about the Truancy Reduction Program, contact:

Steve Hageman
Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office
1300 17th Street–City Centre
Bakersfield, CA 93301–4533
805–636–4757

Coalition Works To Save Kids

Alarmed by a noticeable rise in juvenile crime during school hours and a large increase in the number of school dropouts and children referred to the juvenile court for status offenses, a broad-based coalition of citizens and businesses in Arizona initiated a program that addresses truancy through community interventions.

The Save Kids Partnership was modeled after Operation SAVE KIDS, a successful truancy program in Peoria, Arizona. The Partnership comprises 10 cities and towns and 15 school districts serving more than 63,000 students in western Maricopa County, which includes part of Phoenix. The Partnership is sponsored by WESTMARC, a coalition of businesses, utilities, education institutions, development firms, property owner organizations, industries, cities, and towns in the county.

The Partnership program targets youth 6 to 16 years old. It requires school personnel to monitor school attendance closely and notify parents promptly if their children have 3 days of unexcused absence. The parents must respond, outlining measures they have taken to ensure that their children are attending school. If a child continues to be truant (as evidenced by 5 days of unexcused absence), the school forwards the matter to the city prosecutor's office. The prosecutor sends a second letter to the parents. If a sixth unexcused absence occurs, the school notifies the prosecutor or law enforcement agency to request that criminal charges be filed against the parents.

In lieu of formal criminal proceedings, the prosecutor can offer families a deferred prosecution diversion program designed to strengthen family relationships and encourage youth to go to school. The program includes a risk assessment and evaluation of every participating youth and parent and requires them to complete a counseling program approved by the juvenile court and Office of the City Attorney. The program requires students to attend school and participate in teen or adolescent group counseling and educational programs while their parents complete a parenting skills support group. If parents and juveniles complete the terms of the diversion program's stipulated agreement, the case is dismissed. If the terms are not met, the matter is reviewed for purposes of proceeding as a criminal violation and may be referred to court.

The original Peoria program, Operation SAVE KIDS, has demonstrated solid results. When the program measured its impact on 12 elementary and 2 high schools within Peoria's city limits, it found that after parents were notified by mail of their child's absence, attendance increased for 72.2 percent of the students and only 27.8 percent were referred for prosecution.

The program is conducting a comparison study of three groups: juveniles who are criminally charged with a status offense and fail to appear in court (the control group); juveniles who are criminally charged with a status offense, appear in court with their parents, and opt for, but fail to complete, the diversion program; and juveniles who complete the diversion program with their parents.

Ninety-two percent of Peoria juveniles who completed the diversion program with their parents did not recidivate. Program officials also found that 95 percent of juveniles referred to court for status offenses committed their first offense at an average age of 14; 82 percent of all truancy referrals were first-time offenders; and 48 percent of juveniles cited for status offenses were from broken homes.

Operation SAVE KIDS began in 1994 with Title II Formula Grants Program funds from OJJDP and a matching grant from the city of Peoria. The western Maricopa County program received 1995 Title V delinquency prevention funds from OJJDP.

For more information about the Save Kids Partnership, contact:

Diane McCarthy
WESTMARC President
9017 North 57th Drive
Glendale, AZ 85302
602–435–0431

For more information about Operation SAVE KIDS, contact:

Terry Bays Smith
City of Peoria
Assistant City Attorney
8401 West Monroe Street
Peoria, AZ 85345
602–412–7347

Roswell Curfew Program Makes a Difference

Hoping to make a difference in a truancy problem that had become almost epidemic in areas of Roswell, New Mexico, the city's mayor instituted a curfew during school hours in 1994. The primary goal of the ordinance is to strictly enforce school attendance. It allows police to question students who appear to be truant in the community and requires school officials to notify parents or guardians when students are tardy or absent. Those students who continue to be truant may be assigned community service, and their parents may be fined up to $100.

Roswell's initiative illustrates how the mayor, police, city agency leaders, city council members, educators, and citizens can effectively deal with a major problem by working together. The program's results are impressive, and cities in Arizona, California, and New Mexico have requested information about the curfew from the Roswell Police Department.

Since the curfew began, Roswell police report that daytime burglaries and other reportable crimes in neighborhoods surrounding the city's two high schools have decreased. Police also found that:

- Students who commit burglaries or other crimes generally commit them during school hours and then return after school to retrieve the hidden stolen property.
- Many students detained for daytime curfew violations had been involved with criminal activities such as substance abuse, burglary, larceny, and vandalism.
- Many detained truants had records indicating an escalating pattern of delinquent behavior.
- Most detained truants were aware of and understood the consequences of breaking the law.

School officials are pleased with the results of the daytime curfew because it has reinforced the school district's policy of placing truant students into in-school suspension (ISS). Students in ISS are not allowed to sit at home or roam the streets. Instead they must perform community service such as removing graffiti or picking up trash.

Area businesses are reporting truant students to police more frequently than in the past. Before the curfew was enacted, police instructed callers to contact the Children, Youth and Families Department. However, little was done to intercede with truant children on the spot. The curfew provides an effective way for police to intervene immediately and show youth the consequences of their offending behavior.

Parents are pleased with the program because, until the police contact them, they often are unaware of their child's absence from school. Although the schools attempt to contact parents in the evening to report unexcused absences, the computer-generated calls are easily intercepted by truant students.

Chaves County, which includes Roswell, is adopting a similar ordinance for county students. The city of Roswell is especially pleased because the county curfew will deter truants from leaving the city to avoid the Roswell Police Department.

For more information about the Roswell Daytime Curfew Program, contact:

Mayor Thomas Jennings
City of Roswell
P.O. Drawer 1838
Roswell, NM 88202–1838
505–624–6700

Acting Police Chief Mike Jurecek
Roswell Police Department
P.O. Box 1994
Roswell, NM 88202–1994
505–624–6770

County Sheriff Terrell Tucker
Chaves County
P.O. Box 1396
Roswell, NM 88202–1396
505–624–6500

Summary

As these varied programs indicate, the issue of truancy has captured the attention of communities across the Nation. Whether establishing truancy centers, providing parenting classes, or making unannounced home visits, these seven communities have chosen to intervene before truancy leads to more serious problems for youth and the community.

These communities are wise to be concerned. Students who miss school frequently are often unable to develop interpersonal relationships or gain the knowledge and skills they will need for future employment. Frequent absence affects school performance and can lead to delinquent behavior. A Department of Justice study found that students with low reading achievement show delinquent behavior more often than students with higher reading scores.[9]

Many chronic truants are also likely to drop out of school. U.S. Department of Education statistics indicate that dropouts have lower earnings, experience more unemployment, and are more likely to end up on welfare and in prison than students who complete high school or college.[10]

However, positive factors can protect youth either by reducing the impact of risks or by changing the way they respond to risk factors. Examples of protective factors include positive adult and peer relationships, healthy beliefs, and clear standards of behavior. These factors will not only result in students attending school regularly, but, once in school, at-risk youth will benefit from exposure to such protective factors.

Truancy prevention and intervention efforts protect youth from risk factors and help reduce juvenile delinquency and other related problems. Programs that prevent a young person from becoming involved in the juvenile justice system save taxpayers money, prevent more people from becoming victims of crime, and help prevent the development of future criminal offenders. For the Nation's next generation, preventing truancy may mean the difference between a lifetime of problems or a lifetime of accomplishments.

Resources

Nearly half of the 50 States have implemented truancy prevention and intervention programs using funding from the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act Formula Grants Program, administered by OJJDP, Office of Justice Programs. For more information contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at 800–638–8736.

In addition, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education have created a manual to help parents, school and law enforcement officials, and community leaders combat truancy. The guide describes how successful antitruancy initiatives across the country were planned and implemented. For copies, call 800–624–0100. The full text of the document is available through the Department of Education Web site at http://www.ed.gov.

Other Sources of Information

Abolish Chronic Truancy
Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office
Bureau of Special Operations, Juvenile Division
300 South Park Avenue, Room 621
Pomona, CA 91766
909–620–3330

Alternative Center for Truancy
823 West Central Boulevard
Orlando, FL 32805
407–836–8800

Fulton County Juvenile Court Truancy Intervention Project
4455 Capitol Avenue SW.
Atlanta, GA 30312
404–730–1122

National Association of School Resource Officers
P.O. Box 3379
Sarasota, FL 34230–3379
941–951–5010

National Center for Education Statistics
Office of Education Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
555 New Jersey Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20208–5721
202–219–2221

National Dropout Prevention Center
Clemson University
205 Martin Street
Clemson, SC 29634–0726
864–656–2599

National School Safety Center
4165 Thousand Oaks Boulevard, Suite 290
Westlake Village, CA 91362
805–373–9977

Stop and Cite Program
Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety
Youth and Family Services Division
500 City Hall Drive
Rohnert Park, CA 94928
707–584–2699

Truancy Abatement Burglary Suppression
Crime Prevention Unit
San Jose Police Department
San Jose, CA 95110
408–277–4133

Truancy Intervention Program
Office of the Ramsey County Attorney
50 West Kellogg Boulevard, Suite 315
St. Paul, MN 55102–1657
612–266–3125

Truancy Mediation Program
Mediation Center of Gaston County
401 North Highland Street
Gastonia, NC 28052
704–868–9576

Truancy Prevention Service
Juvenile Court of Memphis and Shelby County
Volunteer Services
616 Adams
Memphis, TN 38105
901–528–8400

In addition, many resources are available online when searching *truancy*, including State legislation and other programs.

Endnotes

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7. "Drug Use Among San Diego Arrestees," *SANDAG Info*, Special Issue 1996 (San Diego, CA: San Diego Association of Governments).
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9. D. Huizinga, R. Loeber, and T. Thornberry (1995), *Urban Delinquency and Substance Abuse* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention), p. 15.
10. M. McMillen, P. Kaufman, and S. Whitener (1994), *Dropout Rates in the United States: 1993* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics).

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